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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000435

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SUBJECT: BELGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER AN INCOVENIENT GUEST IN KINSHASA

Classified By: PolOff Tracy Naber, reasons 1.4 b/d

11. (SBU) Summary: Belgian Foreign Minister Karel de Gucht had frank criticism for both sides involved in the March 22-23 violence in Kinshasa during his April 10-12 visit to the DRC. He reiterated Belgium's desire for a post-CIAT mechanism for political dialogue and discussed governance issues with parliamentary leaders. He characterized his last-minute meeting with President Kabila as "extremely frank and open." End summary.

12. (U) Belgian Foreign Minister Karel de Gucht arrived in Kinshasa April 10 for a three-day visit, his fifth to the DRC during his tenure. The DRC was the second stop on a multi-country African tour, which began in Liberia and includes Zambia, Angola, Rwanda, and Burundi.

13. (U) De Gucht met with President Kabila, Minister of Foreign Affairs Mbusa Nyamwisi, key National Assembly deputies including President Vital Kamerhe, senior ministers, and several chief of mission. His remarks at a large reception April 10 to Congolese officials and members of the diplomatic corps were filmed by a Belgian TV crew.

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Criticism for both sides in March 22-23 unrest  
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14. (U) De Gucht criticized both sides in last month's clashes in Kinshasa. In a clear reference to Senator Jean-Pierre Bemba, de Gucht told National Assembly deputies "it is unacceptable that members of the opposition have private militia." He denounced the "aggressive and provocative behavior" of opposition forces and said "the monopoly of force remains with the legitimate government." At the same time, he condemned the "premature and disproportionate" use of force by the Congolese army, language picked up from an earlier, controversial statement issued by EU Ambassadors in Kinshasa. He called for an acceleration of military reforms, saying "the first lesson to draw from the fighting is the need for a better and swifter process of national disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration into society" of combatants. He promised Belgian assistance but called on the Congolese government to take the lead on reforms.

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"Recess is over" for new leaders  
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15. (SBU) De Gucht pointedly asked whether "recess was really

over" (referring to President Kabila's inaugural address when Kabila said "recess"-- or "playtime" -- was over). He said that government needs to show the population tangible results, adding that it is not acceptable that "people who voted for democracy should see their efforts stymied by the political class" and criticized indirect senatorial and gubernatorial elections as "not transparent." He said the DRC would profit from a "frank and open" partnership between their two countries. He listed a number of areas where Belgium could work with the DRC, including health, education, and army integration, and underlined the particular importance of the mining sector. He also announced the opening of a Belgian Consulate in Bukavu, South Kivu.

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A post-CIAT "mechanism for dialogue"  
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¶16. (C) De Gucht pushed privately and publicly for the establishment of post-CIAT "mechanism for dialogue," calling for the body to be "quick, flexible, and effective." De Gucht said he had just come from Monrovia, where he met with newly-elected President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and saw how such a mechanism could work. (Comment: The mechanism in Liberia is a economic coordination group and not the sort of post-CIAT mechanism for political dialogue and "oversight" that Belgium has been promoting. The Belgian Ambassador told us that de Gucht did not raise this topic with President Kabila.  
End comment.)

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A last-minute meeting with President Kabila  
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¶17. (C) On April 11, de Gucht met with Foreign Minister Mbusa Nyamwisi and ministerial members of the steering committee on reconstruction before leaving for a conference in Lubumbashi. (Note: At a separate meeting with Ambassador Meece on April 11, the Foreign Minister later characterized de Gucht's visit as "not easy." End comment.) When meeting with the press immediately after his meeting with Nyamwisi, de Gucht complained that neither President Kabila nor Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga had agreed to meet with him. He was interrupted, however, with the news that Kabila would see him.

¶18. (C) In comments to the press, de Gucht called his 80-minute meeting with Kabila "extremely frank and open." He was accompanied by the Belgian Ambassador, and Kabila had Presidency Political and Diplomatic Advisor Marcelin Cishambo with him. The Belgian Embassy's political counselor told us de Gucht was happy he did not have to "make any concessions" to Kabila. After the meeting, de Gucht told the press that Kabila "did not share the opinion of the European Union" about the March 22-23 events, which 14 resident ambassadors had previously condemned. Kabila made no comment on the 80-minute meeting. De Gucht flew to Lubumbashi later that day for a conference on transparency in the mining sector.

¶19. (C) Comment: De Gucht's visit was difficult for all involved. Kabila and his circle have long bristled at de Gucht's often outspoken charged public remarks, and de Gucht's repeated calls for a post-CIAT mechanism have further strained relations. Presidency hardliners were also unhappy that de Gucht reportedly announced his visit before asking for Congolese concurrence and that the Belgians had criticized the government for the March violence. End comment.  
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